

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

August 8, 2019

The Honorable Sonny Perdue  
Secretary  
The U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Ave., SW  
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue:

We are writing to oppose the disastrous rule to revise the use of broad-based categorical eligibility for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which will make it harder for millions of families to get the nutrition assistance they need. If enacted, the Trump Administration's own analysis of this rule estimates that 3.1 million people — nearly nine percent of SNAP recipients — would lose their benefits. No one should go hungry in the United States of America.

This plan would disproportionately punish working families who are already struggling to put food on the table and make ends meet. Today, more than 13 million American children live in poverty, more than one in five people experiencing homelessness are children, and the United States has the highest youth poverty rate and infant mortality rate among comparable nations. Currently, 84 percent of SNAP benefits go to households with children, seniors, or a person with a disability, and 50 percent of children will receive SNAP at some point in their childhoods.<sup>1</sup>

Families with children are more likely to face food insecurity, and in 2017, the number of families facing food insecurity rose for the first time since the Great Recession.<sup>2</sup> Access to SNAP has been shown to improve health and educational outcomes for school children.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, schools rely on SNAP enrollment when determining eligibility for free school meals, so households could be penalized twice: once with the loss of household SNAP benefits and again with the loss of free school meals for children. In fact, USDA estimates 500,000 children will lose their automatic eligibility for free school meals.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Food Research & Action Center, "SNAP Benefits Need to Be Made Adequate, Not Cut Or Restricted" (February 2018). Online at: <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/snap-food-choice.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Food Research & Action Center, "Food Hardship in America: A Look at National, Regional, State, and Metropolitan Statistical Area Data on Household Struggles With Hunger" (August 2018). Online at: <https://www.frac.org/wp-content/uploads/food-hardship-july-2018.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Steven Carlson and Brynne Keith-Jennings, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, "SNAP Is Linked with Improved Nutritional Outcomes and Lower Health Care Costs" (January 17, 2018). Online at: <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/snap-is-linked-with-improved-nutritional-outcomes-and-lower-health-care>. ; Edward A. Frongillo, Diana F. Jyoti, and Sonya J. Jones, The Journal of Nutrition, "Food Stamp Program Participation Is Associated with Better Academic Learning among School Children" (April 2006). Online at: <https://academic.oup.com/jn/article/136/4/1077/4664206>.

<sup>4</sup> Laura Camera, U.S. News, "500,000 Poor Kids Could Lose Eligibility for Free School Lunch" (July 29, 2019). Online at: <https://www.usnews.com/news/education-news/articles/2019-07-29/democrats-white-house-buries-impact-of-food-stamp-eligibility-changes>

A recent study from the Urban Institute found that the average cost of a low-income meal was 27 percent higher than the maximum benefit.<sup>5</sup> In order to cover the cost of food, USDA would need to increase the average benefit by about \$46.50 per person per month<sup>6</sup>. In addition, the USDA's estimate of how much low-income families should spend on food relies on unrealistic assumptions of food access and the amount of time low-income families have available to prepare meals.<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, families must already go through a robust vetting process to verify income eligibility. USDA's assertion that families can simply receive an informational brochure in order to qualify for SNAP is simply not true.<sup>8</sup> Perpetuating this lie breeds distrust in a successful program that lifted 8.4 million people out of poverty in 2015.<sup>9</sup> USDA also erroneously asserts that higher income individuals take advantage of SNAP benefits. In reality, fraud is virtually nonexistent in this program; just 0.2 percent of benefits mistakenly go to households with net incomes above the poverty line.<sup>10</sup> Further, there are many more people who qualify for SNAP that are not enrolled in the program.<sup>11</sup> USDA's resources would be better spent focusing on increasing participation among all who are eligible, rather than trying to limit participation among people who are already struggling.

In a nation where the three wealthiest people own more wealth than the bottom half, increasing the barriers for hungry families is unconscionable. Last year, the United Nations report by the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights noted that "in a rich country like the United States, the persistence of extreme poverty is a political choice made by those in power."<sup>12</sup> With this proposal you are once again doubling down on that choice.

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<sup>5</sup> Elaine Waxman, Craig Gundersen, and Megan Thompson, Urban Institute, "How Far Do SNAP Benefits Fall Short of Covering the Cost of a Meal?" (February 2018). Online at: [https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/96661/how\\_far\\_do\\_snap\\_benefits\\_fall\\_short\\_of\\_covering\\_the\\_cost\\_of\\_a\\_meal\\_4.pdf](https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/96661/how_far_do_snap_benefits_fall_short_of_covering_the_cost_of_a_meal_4.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Food Research & Action Center, "SNAP Benefits Need to Be Made Adequate, Not Cut Or Restricted" (February 2018). Online at: <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/snap-food-choice.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> United States Department of Agriculture, "Regulatory Reform at a Glance Proposed Rule: Revision of SNAP Categorical Eligibility" (July 23, 2019). Online at: [https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/BBCE\\_Fact\\_Sheet\\_%28FINAL%29\\_72219-PR.pdf](https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/BBCE_Fact_Sheet_%28FINAL%29_72219-PR.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> Arloc Sherman, Center on budget and Policy Priorities, "Census: Programs Eyed for Cuts Keep Millions from Poverty" (September 12, 2018). Online at: <https://www.cbpp.org/blog/census-programs-eyed-for-cuts-keep-millions-from-poverty>.

<sup>10</sup> Robert Greenstein, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, "Misguided Trump Administration Rule Would Take Basic Food Assistance From Working Families, Seniors, and People With Disabilities" (July 23, 2019). Online at: <https://www.cbpp.org/press/statements/misguided-trump-administration-rule-would-take-basic-food-assistance-from-working>.

<sup>11</sup> United States Department of Agriculture, "Reaching Those in Need: Estimates of State Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Participation Rates in 2016 – Summary" (March 2019). Online at: <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/resource-files/Reaching2016-Summary.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> United Nations General Assembly, "Report of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights on his mission to the United States of America" (May 4, 2018). Online at: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G18/125/30/PDF/G1812530.pdf?OpenElement>

Millions of families will go hungry if your administration moves forward with this policy. We urge you to immediately rescind this shortsighted proposal. Thank you for your careful consideration of our comments.

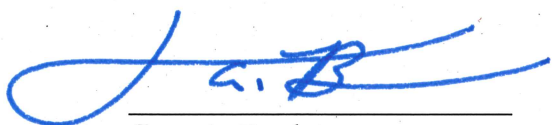
Sincerely,



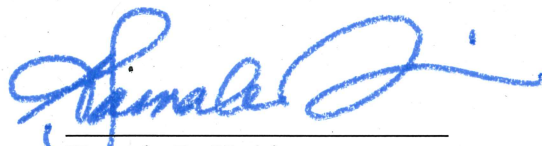
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United States Senator



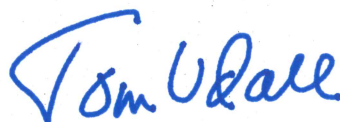
Terri A. Sewell  
Member of Congress



Cory A. Booker  
United States Senator



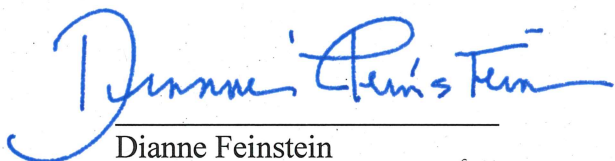
Kamala D. Harris  
United States Senator



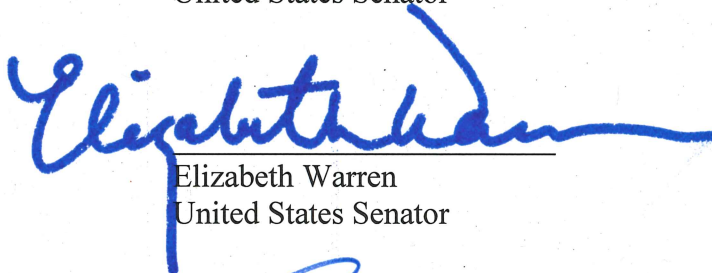
Tom Udall  
United States Senator



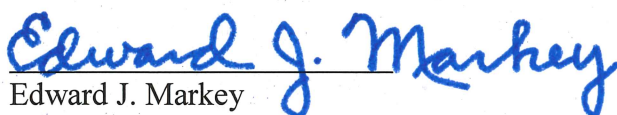
Kirsten Gillibrand  
United States Senator



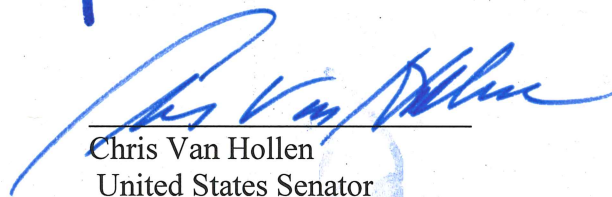
Dianne Feinstein  
United States Senator



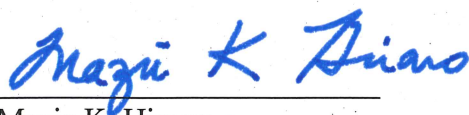
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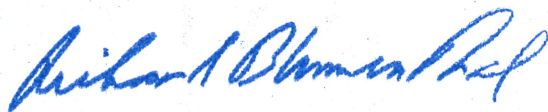
Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator



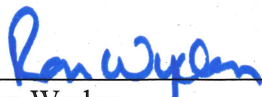
Chris Van Hollen  
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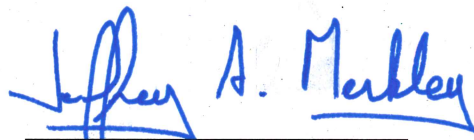
Mazie K. Hirono  
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Richard Blumenthal  
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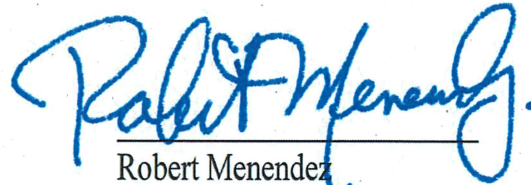
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Benjamin L. Cardin  
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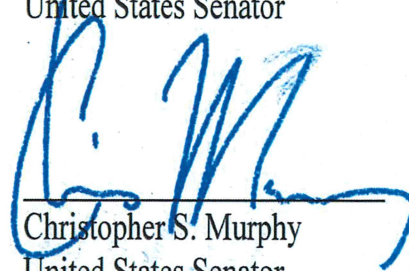
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Robert Menendez  
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Tammy Duckworth  
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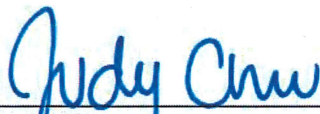
Christopher S. Murphy  
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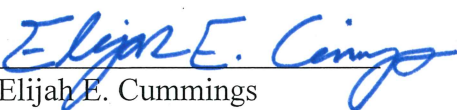
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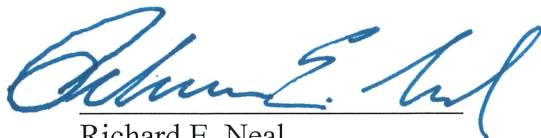
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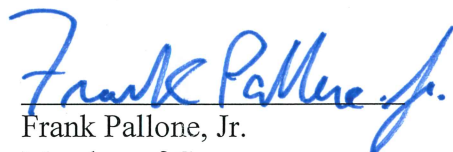
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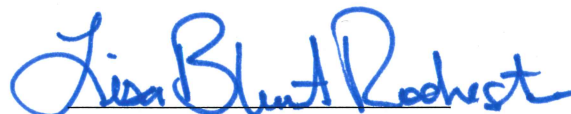
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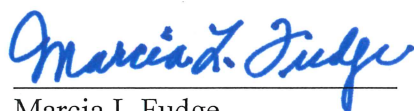
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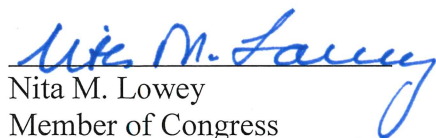
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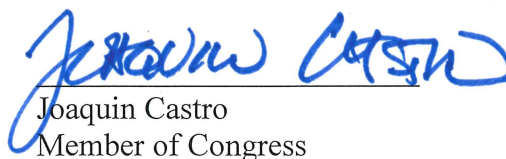
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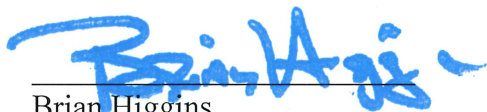
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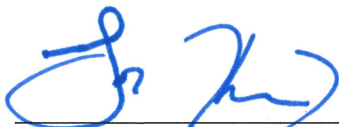
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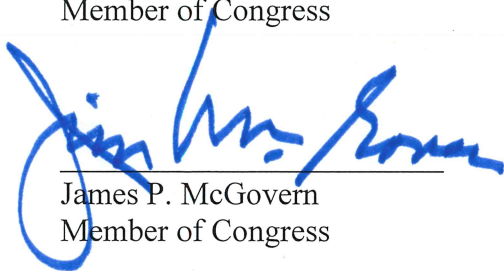
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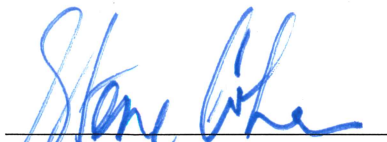
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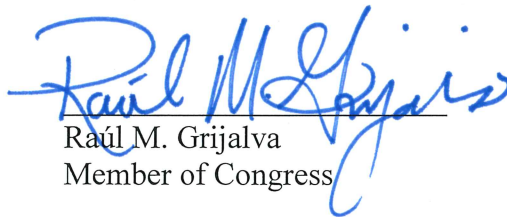
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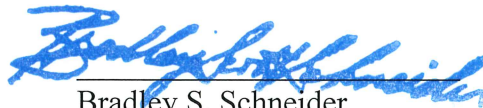
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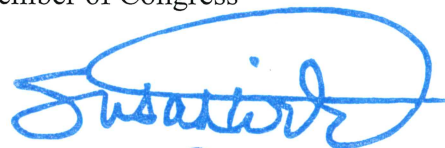
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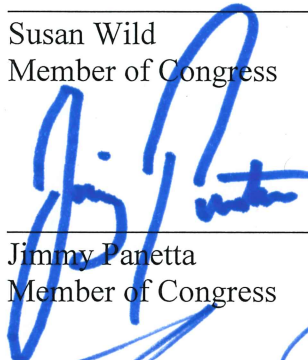
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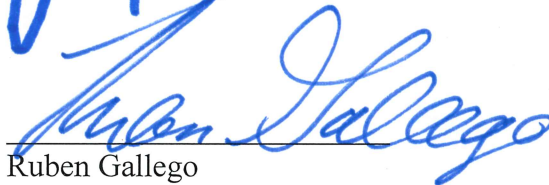
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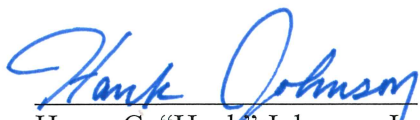
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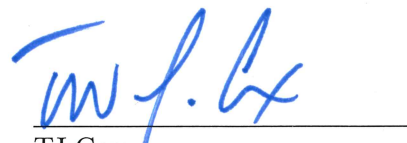


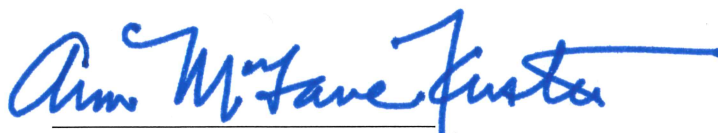
Lucille Roybal-Allard  
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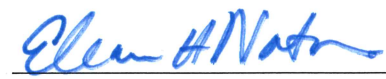



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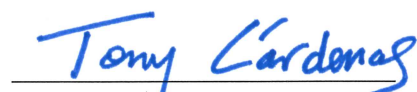
  
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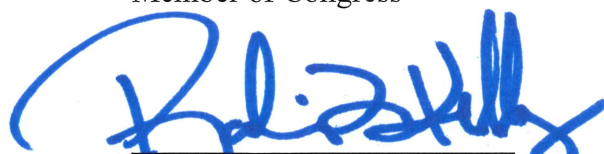
  
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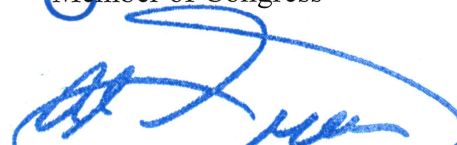
  
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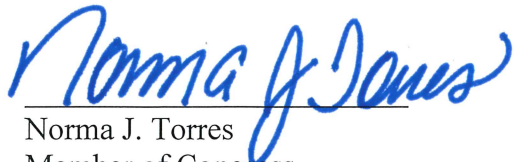
  
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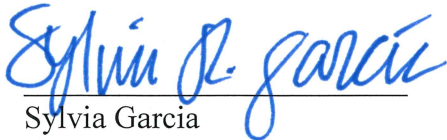
  
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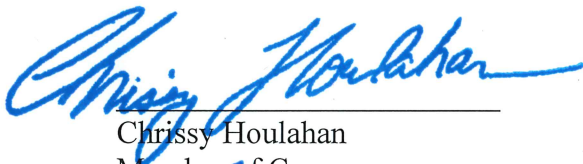
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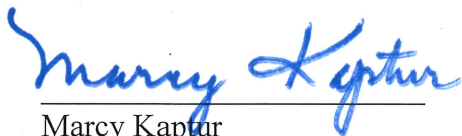
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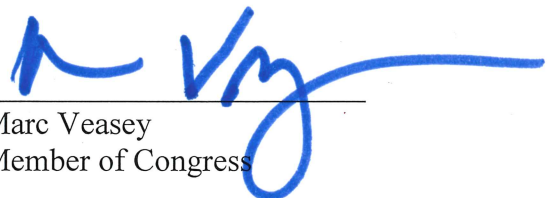
Chellie Pingree  
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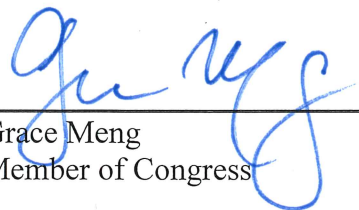
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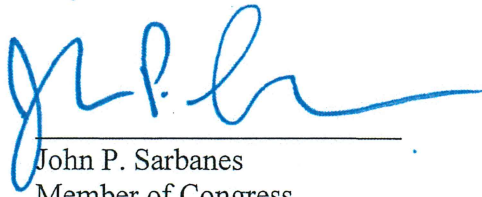
Alan Lowenthal  
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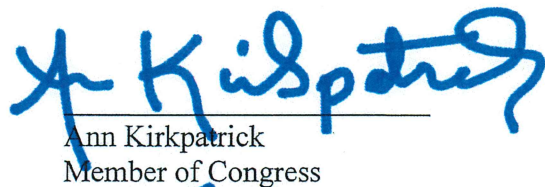
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Member of Congress



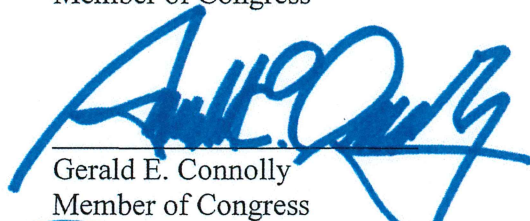
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Member of Congress



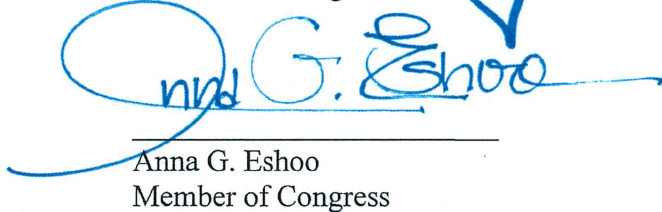
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Member of Congress



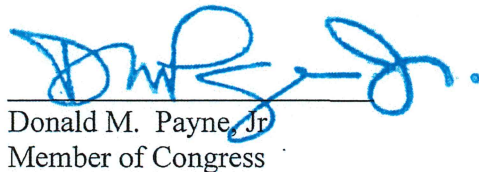
Ann Kirkpatrick  
Member of Congress



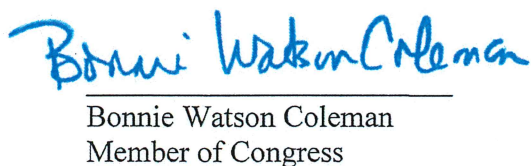
Gerald E. Connolly  
Member of Congress



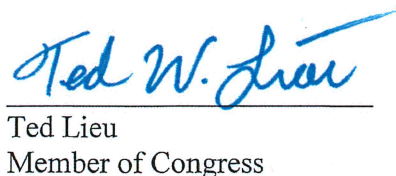
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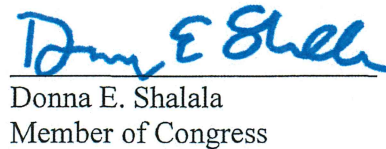
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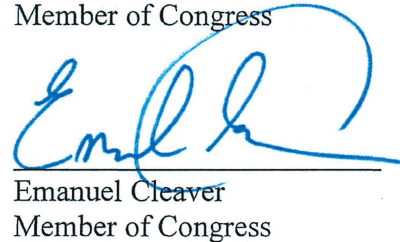
Donna E. Shalala  
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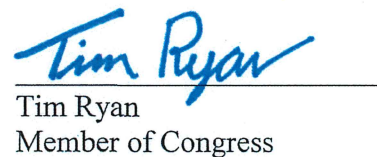
Mark Pocan  
Member of Congress



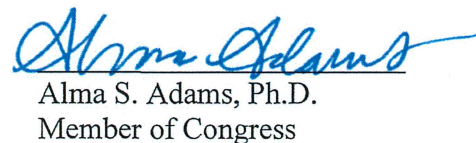
Bill Pascrell, Jr.  
Member of Congress



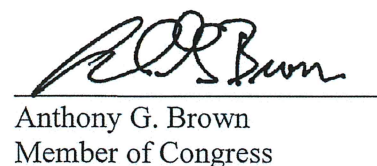
Emanuel Cleaver  
Member of Congress



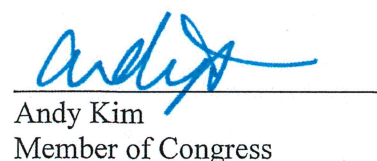
Tim Ryan  
Member of Congress



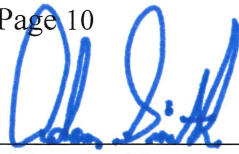
Alma S. Adams, Ph.D.  
Member of Congress



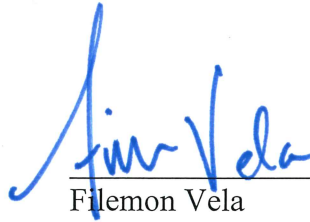
Anthony G. Brown  
Member of Congress



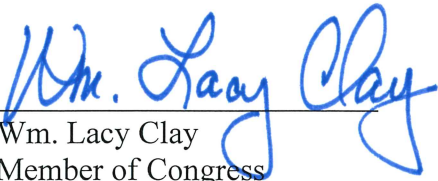
Andy Kim  
Member of Congress



Adam Smith  
Member of Congress



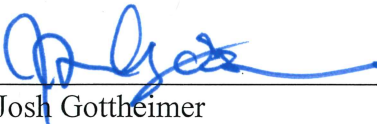
Filemon Vela  
Member of Congress



Wm. Lacy Clay  
Member of Congress



J. Luis Correa  
Member of Congress



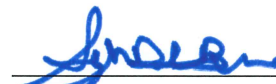
Josh Gottheimer  
Member of Congress



Jim Cooper  
Member of Congress



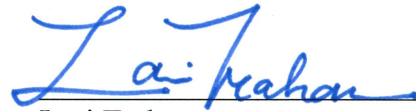
Angie Craig  
Member of Congress



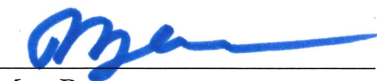
Suzan K. Delbene  
Member of Congress



Ro Khanna  
Member of Congress



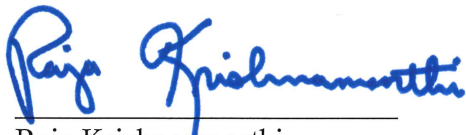
Lori Trahan  
Member of Congress



Max Rose  
Member of Congress



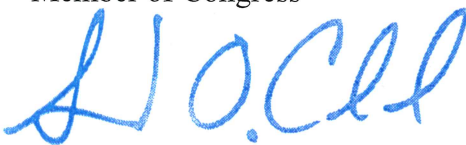
Earl Blumenauer  
Member of Congress



Raja Krishnamoorthi  
Member of Congress



Darren Soto  
Member of Congress




Salud O. Carbajal  
Member of Congress



John Garamendi  
Member of Congress



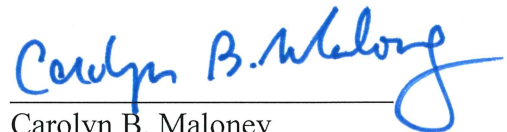
Tulsi Gabbard  
Member of Congress



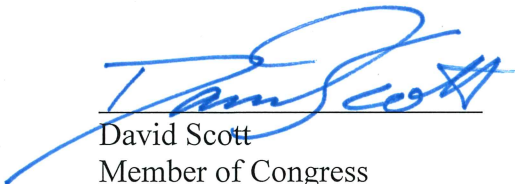
John A. Yarmuth  
Member of Congress



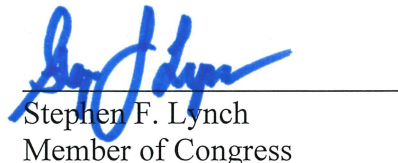
David E. Price  
Member of Congress



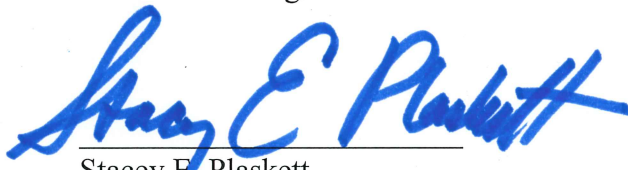
Carolyn B. Maloney  
Member of Congress



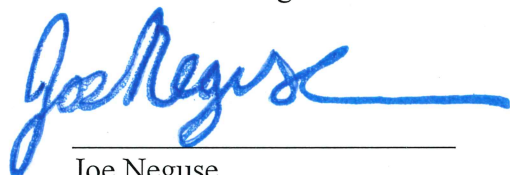
David Scott  
Member of Congress



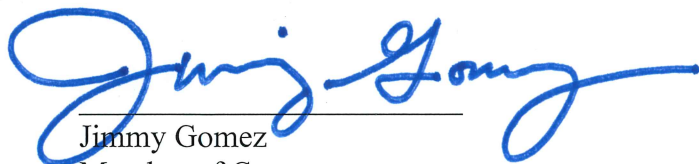
Stephen F. Lynch  
Member of Congress



Stacey E. Plaskett  
Member of Congress



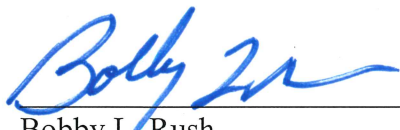
Joe Neguse  
Member of Congress



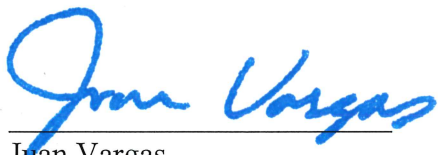
Jimmy Gomez  
Member of Congress



Sean Patrick Maloney  
Member of Congress



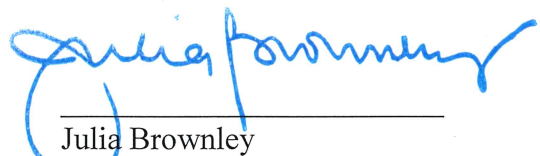
Bobby L. Rush  
Member of Congress



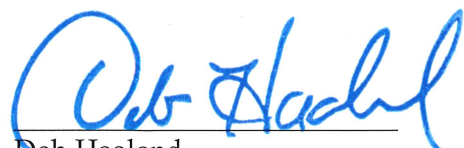
Juan Vargas  
Member of Congress



James R. Langevin  
Member of Congress



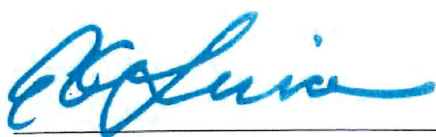
Julia Brownley  
Member of Congress



Deb Haaland  
Member of Congress



A. Donald McEachin  
Member of Congress

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Elaine G. Luria", is positioned above a horizontal line.

Elaine G. Luria  
Member of Congress